

Pásztor A.

[Destination unknown? Study choices and graduate destinations of Hungarian youth in Slovakia.](#)

European Journal of Education 2017

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12259>

Copyright:

This is the peer reviewed version of an article which has been published in final form at <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12259>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Self-Archiving.

Date deposited:

10/06/2017

Embargo release date:

21 December 2019

Destination unknown? Study choices and graduate destinations of Hungarian youth in Slovakia

Adél Pásztor, Newcastle University, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology,
Claremont Road, NE1 7RU Newcastle upon Tyne. E-mail: adel.pasztor@ncl.ac.uk

Abstract

Focusing on Hungarian minority youth in a rural Slovakian setting, the paper explores the higher education aspirations and choices of young people amidst significant economic, political and educational reforms. Relying on mixed methods and a longitudinal design the research follows a cohort of high school students from their last year of secondary school through university up to their graduate destinations several years onwards. The collected data reveal three main study-work trajectories reflecting different trade-offs in terms of HE studies, graduate careers and ethnic identity maintenance all affecting the individuals' life-chances as well as the future of the Hungarian community in Slovakia.

1.INTRODUCTION

The massive influx in many countries of Western-Europe strongly focused research on immigrants and their descendants when examining potential ethnic inequalities in education in recent decades (Heath, Rethon, & Kilpi, 2008). At the same time, research on historic minorities in Central-Eastern Europe was patchy at best, with discussions rarely reaching the Western hemisphere which focused on solving its own dilemmas and neglected the issues faced by historic minorities elsewhere.

The historic, linguistic, or, as locally referred to, national minorities of Central Eastern Europe were victims of border-movements without ever changing their residence. For example, many Hungarians became citizens of the neighbouring countries as a result of post-War territorial arrangements¹ (Brubaker, 1995). Whilst World War II led to subsequent border-changes, there still remains a considerable Hungarian-speaking population in all countries neighbouring Hungary, the so-called ‘motherland’, making this group one of the largest ethnic minority populations in Central Europe (A magyarok, 2006). Whilst there are ethnic Hungarians in significant numbers in Romania, Ukraine, and Serbia, the focus of this article is the Hungarians of Slovakia², where earlier research indicated relatively slow progress in terms of bridging the educational gap between minority and majority youth (Pásztor, 2006). Here, even the most up-to-date statistics point towards persisting educational inequalities, as the share of higher-educated ethnic Hungarians continues to lag behind that of the majority (7% vs. 12%). Thus, despite the sweeping changes brought about in the last decade, the educational gap failed to close.

Following the change of régime in 1989, the most significant milestone was the accession to the EU in 2004, opening up the borders to new educational and work opportunities in the neighbouring countries and beyond. At the same time, the higher education (HE) sector was completely transformed: the five-year degree programmes were split into BAs and masters (3+2) whilst further developments included the appearance of private HE providers, the expansion of part-time and distance education, and the mushrooming of branch campuses, bringing HE closer to home (Kogan, 2012). The year also coincided with the foundation of a university in Komárno, as well as the

Faculty of Central European Studies in Nitra, both offering university-level education in Hungarian to ethnic minority youth wishing to study in their mother tongue.

With the growing number of HE providers and the relaxing of barriers of entry, obtaining a university education no longer remained the privilege of a selected few. This was underlined by historically high levels of demand, peaking in 2006 when 67% of the relevant age cohort submitted an application for a place at a higher education institution (UIPS, 2006). With an unprecedented demand for tertiary education and the many changes taking place locally, nationally and internationally, there was a need to re-evaluate why these developments failed to translate into greater university participation for the Hungarian ethnic minority. In order to explore how Hungarian minority students take higher education decisions in the Slovakian context, and how their choices eventually play out, this research follows a cohort of Hungarian youth from the final year of secondary school beyond graduation, offering an in-depth insight into their educational aspirations, choices and graduate destinations in a rural Slovakian setting.

2. ETHNIC INEQUALITIES IN ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

With an ever rising number of young people enrolling in higher education institutions across the developing world (Arum, Gamoran & Shavit, 2007), greater attention is being paid to widening participation, thus ensuring that access to higher education opportunities is not classed, gendered or raced. Whilst women's participation rates have caught up with those of men in most Western societies (and even surpassed them), social class inequalities proved to be more persistent in most of the countries (Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993; Breen & Jonsson, 2005). Ethnic differences, on the other hand, failed to show a uniform pattern. They appeared to be country- or ethnic group specific, i.e. showing significantly low representations of ethnic minorities in some countries, whilst having

equal or relatively high representations in others, in addition to between- and within group differences (Modood *et al.*, 1997; Purcell *et al.*, 2008; Richardson, 2008; Torgerson *et al.*, 2008).

In search for explanations, scholars remained split between two camps: either emphasising the effects of social class over race or ethnicity, or vice versa. Research on ethnic minority access to HE in the UK increasingly focused on social class differences, assuming that the latter were ‘more apparent and significant than minority ethnic similarities’ as ‘ethnicity on its own does not explain or account for the choices of ethnic minority students’ (Ball, Reay & David, 2002, pp. 333-335). Whilst, on the surface, ethnic minorities seemed to be overrepresented in the UK HE system, the inequality lay in the kind of HE institutions they attended (Bhattachayya, Ison & Blair, 2003; Connor *et al.*, 2004; Tolley & Rundle, 2006). Their clustering in low-tariff institutions raised concerns (Boliver, 2016) about a potential bias against ethnic minority applicants in the university application system. However, amid fears of fitting in and losing their authenticity (Reay *et al.*, 2005), ethnic minority students themselves were often avoiding the high tariff institutions in favour of the ‘modern’ universities where they believed they would find more ‘people like me’. HE choices, however, seemed to be classed, as well as raced, since ‘embedded choosers’ (Ball *et al.*, 2002) with a family history of HE found the ethnic mix of the student body less relevant for their choice than the quality of the education and the prestige of the university, confirming the strong effect of social class on HE decision-making.

At the same time, in a comparable situation in Germany, young people of Turkish origin (Kristen, Reimer & Kogan, 2008) were far more likely than Germans to enter tertiary education (even after controlling for final grades), but, contradicting the British pattern, they went on to choose academically-oriented universities rather than the lower-

tier applied higher education institutions (HEIs). Across the border, in The Netherlands, Pásztor's (2010) research has shown how Turkish students aspiring to reach higher educational levels by-passed the tracking system that channelled them towards vocational school tracks by entering HE indirectly via the 'long route'. Despite the longer time to degree and the potentially lower chance of graduating, they were set on going 'higher and higher' than their parents' generation by opting for degrees in law, medicine and economics (Pásztor, 2012). These 'ethnic effects', operating above and beyond those of social class background, were often explained by differences in educational aspirations, since immigrant families frequently showed strong motivation and cultural values that promoted educational endeavours (Heath, Rethon & Kilpi, 2008; Kao & Tienda, 1995; 1998).

In contrast to immigrant groups, there is very little contextual evidence with regard to HE aspirations and decision-making of historic minorities, as research has overwhelmingly focused on earlier educational transitions in these particular settings. In order to remedy this situation, this article provides much-needed insight into the educational aspirations, choices and graduate destinations of a cohort of young Hungarians in order to better understand the peculiarities of HE access and participation for historic minorities.

4. ETHNIC MINORITY SCHOOLING IN SLOVAKIA

One cannot fully appreciate the peculiarities of educational decision-making in the Slovakian setting without appreciating the importance the ethnic community places on mother tongue education of their offspring. For Hungarians, it is the cornerstone of ethnic minority survival and community-maintenance, covering the essential need of the

community to reverse language shift and give a sense of ethnic identity to the younger generations (Csergo, 2007). To ensure this, they successfully maintain a parallel school system providing education in Hungarian alongside the national school system teaching in Slovak. In line with this, two conflicting understandings have been developed: one which favours the national school system amid fears of their offspring not succeeding in the dominant society, and the other, for which the choice of a Hungarian school is a 'non-choice', that is where 'they belong', regardless of any true or implied consequences (for Slovakia see e.g. Lampl, 1999; for Romania e.g. Sorbán & Dobos, 1997). There is an apparent opposition culture at work here (Ogbu, 1978; 1991), only, it does not stand up against schooling in general, but rather opposes education in the majority language.

It is no surprise that most research has focused almost exclusively on this particular educational juncture, as school choice translates into a decision between keeping one's ethnic identity (whilst ensuring the maintenance of the ethnic community) and improving individual mobility chances by better mastering the national language (with the possibility of assimilation and loss for the ethnic community). At the individual level, the choice between the national and the minority school system often boils down to social class, as higher-educated parents appreciate the benefits of mother tongue education more than the low-educated (Papp, 2012), pointing towards varied within-group aspirations and imagined futures.

Nevertheless, research is lacking on the effects of early school choice on further educational choices and individual careers within the ethnic community or beyond. For example, very little is known about how Hungarian students respond to the HE landscape and the main factors on which they base their university choices. In general, students with a 'maturita' (equivalent of British A levels or baccalaureate) can apply for any course at any HE institution, but access greatly differs among HE institutions, with almost two-

thirds of universities requiring a tailored entry exam and only a smaller number applying grade-based admissions. The limited data on university applications suggest that Hungarian students find their HE choices greatly limited by location, as statistics indicate that 90% generally target up to eight HEIs (UIPS, 2006). Taking geographic location and access to public transport into consideration limits their choice to three major destinations: Bratislava with a range of prestigious universities generally perceived as offering the highest quality of education in the country; the former polytechnics in Nitra offering teacher training and courses in agriculture, and the new university in Komárno offering courses in business, teaching and theology. Other than that, there are HEIs in the neighbouring Hungary, as well as in the Czech Republic, which generally attract a smaller proportion of the qualifying student body, in addition to a range of newly-opened branch campuses of Hungarian HEIs. With each of these locations representing different futures both in terms of their ethnic identity and occupational prospects after graduation, it is important to explore the educational decision-making processes of Hungarian youth to understand their HE choices.

5. THE RESEARCH STUDY

In order to study the aspirations and the educational decision-making process of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, an in-depth study was carried out in a small Southern Slovakian town, referred to as Smalltown. Smalltown is located at the Slovak-Hungarian border and has a mixed population, two-thirds of which considered themselves as Hungarian at the last census date (Census, 2011). The town has several primary schools providing Hungarian language instruction (alongside schools teaching in the national language). At secondary school level, there is a vocational school and two university preparatory

schools referred to as ‘gymnasia’ (a Catholic and a state school). Higher education, however, is much less accessible, as Smalltown is far from all university cities, thus making living at home or daily commuting impossible.

In terms of methodology, a survey questionnaire was administered in 2005 to all final year students enrolled in the three secondary schools with Hungarian language instruction in Smalltown, resulting in 91 completed questionnaires soliciting a detailed overview of individual post-secondary aspirations and preliminary higher education choices. Subsequently, two classes across these schools were selected for an in-depth study and a sample of students (20) were interviewed about their educational choices and aspirations in more detail. These interviews were supplemented with teacher interviews (head teachers and career councillors) in both schools under study. For reasons of confidentiality, the names of the interviewed students were replaced by pseudonyms.

The site has since been revisited twice. Because most students enrolled in five-year degrees and some took gap years or did not enter HE immediately, the first revisit was scheduled to take place six³ years on. The follow-up aimed to draw a comparison between students’ initial choices and their present study destinations, whilst noting their success in graduating, including any drop-outs. But as most of the cohort were yet to settle in their first jobs, a second visit proved necessary to collect full information on their graduate destinations. Further qualitative interviews were carried out with those who were willing to be part of the project. Those who were out of reach or unavailable for a personal interview were contacted via email, others were followed up on Facebook to solicit information on their study and work destinations. The latter information was cross-checked with former class mates and the teachers at the studied secondary schools, thus ensuring a complete picture of student destinations for the studied cohort.

6. FINDINGS

6.1. Contextualising the higher education choices of Hungarians students: Survey results

The questionnaires (consisting of a range of closed and open questions) documented the variance in educational aspirations across the school tracks, representing their different intake, curriculum and educational focus. As expected in a stratified education system, students in the vocationally-oriented secondary school track were least inclined to consider higher education. Only two out of a class of 21 mentioned university as a possibility, the rest were either overwhelmingly unsure about their future or aspired to a wide range of vocations (other than those they were being trained for). In the gymnasia, the situation was very different. Here, most students considered going to university, as they were increasingly aware that they ‘needed a degree to do anything’. Higher education was viewed by many as a possible way out of financial insecurity and dependence, a dreaded life from pay-cheque to pay-cheque, which they knew all too well from their parents’ experiences. At the same time, for many of these young people, choosing a HEI came with the realisation that creating their imagined futures may no longer be possible within the language border: ‘I won’t be able to stay at home, there is nothing here’. Thus the decision about higher education became a life-changing decision, as it carried the risk of leaving the ethnic community for good.

Perhaps, as a result of this, many students were at a loss when attempting to imagine their ‘grown up’ future. Only a quarter had concrete plans, with the overwhelming majority of Hungarian youth undecided about their post-secondary destinations. There was considerable variation within the student cohort in terms of

imagined futures: whilst some saw themselves in high-flying careers in law, medicine, economics or IT, others cited vocational destinations that were inconsistent with their current path of study. The overall confusion is best reflected in a student's hesitation between a degree in psychology and becoming a beautician.

When deciding where to apply, students overwhelmingly relied on 'cold knowledge' (Ball & Vincent, 1998), mostly limited to the Internet and the HE catalogue. In terms of the decision-making process itself, Hungarian students came across as not informed (even misinformed, in some cases) and somewhat 'detached' from the choice process. This was partly due to the lack of information and support both at school and at home. At this stage, many parents were uninvolved, as most had not been to university and were unable to provide much advice other than emotional support.

Bearing in mind their imagined futures, there were two main criteria whereby Hungarian high school students chose between potential HE institutions: language (of instruction) and location⁴. Language was a highly influential factor when deciding which university to apply to, as mother tongue education would have been the preferred option for 70% of the surveyed cohort. Whilst some were more pragmatic than others, it was the successful students and those with parents who had graduated from Slovak HEIs who were less concerned with the language of instruction, as they put the quality of education, the university's prestige and graduate employability before other factors.

Students seemed to understand the relationship between institutional prestige and mother tongue education, since the choice of capital city HEIs increased with average grade performance (Table 1), with almost two-thirds of straight A students making it their first choice destination. Thus, language of instruction notwithstanding, Bratislava was the obvious choice for students who excelled at secondary school. At the same time, there

was an opposite relationship between grade average and Komárno, the new Hungarian HEI, as 42% of C students chose it as their preferred institution (compared to only 16% of A students). Between these two options there was Nitra with its two universities specialising in teaching and agriculture which was chosen consistently (around 20%) across the different student grade groups.

[table 1 about here]

Study destinations not only embodied graduate prospects and the prestige of the institutions, but even more so for the contingent choosers, the geographic distance from home. Geographic location severely limited student choice, as it allowed them to concentrate on a limited number of study destinations (essentially those on the Smalltown – Bratislava bus route) while disregarding everything else (with the exception of the new university in Komárno). As one of the students pointed out: ‘I didn’t want to end up in the middle of nowhere.’ or ‘I briefly considered going to Trnava but what can I say, even the buses don’t go there.’ Geographic proximity became so over-prioritised in some cases that it overwrote any other criteria that were potentially relevant for choice making. This was the case for five female students who uniformly opted to study at a newly-opened satellite campus of a Hungarian HEI (close to Smalltown), only to discover that they would be unable to graduate there since the site was shut down a year into their education. Whilst one student eventually completed her studies at the main campus (100 kms away in Hungary), the other four students dropped out of HE.

Altogether 36% of the surveyed students graduated from HEIs six years after completing their high school education, and a further 20% started university, but dropped out. Most of the drop-outs were either enrolled in teacher training in Komárno or in

agriculture at Nitra. No student dropped out from the high tariff institutions. It is also worth noting that, on my second visit, 15% of the surveyed students lived and worked abroad, having chosen migration as a more viable option to higher education back home.

7. STUDY CHOICES AND GRADUATE DESTINATIONS: TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY

7.1 Type 1 – Destination: the Slovak capital (Bratislava)

Students in this group were ambitious, but wanted to remain in Slovakia, believing that they were ‘here to stay’. Depending on their field of study, return (within the language border) was unlikely, since finding a job that corresponded to their education would only be possible if they stayed on in the capital after graduation. This group generally included students who excelled in secondary school and opted to study at prestigious capital city institutions regardless of the language of instruction. They tended to have the characteristics of ‘embedded choosers’ (Reay, David & Ball, 2005), as they not only took the university’s prestige into account, but also had a specific career in mind when making their HE decisions. They were aware of the importance of preparatory sessions and/or were able to afford lessons to improve their chances of entering their chosen institution. They were more likely to come from families where parents went to university. The common denominator of this group was the focus on the capital and wanting to have a career, as well as the good grades which allowed them to access the fields and institutions of their choice.

A good example is Tibor who comes from a family of educated parents who live in a rural area near Smalltown. The value of education has been instilled in him from a young age so he believes that having a good education is a key to getting ahead in life.

Tibor is keen on studying law and is set on enrolling in a university in the capital, driven by the prestige of the institutions and the availability of graduate jobs upon completion. Being aware of the competitiveness of the course, he follows the preparatory training for potential law students offered at his prospective HEI. Parental support is essential. His father must make an almost 400 km roundtrip every weekend to take him to the preparatory sessions: 'My parents said it's fine, as long as I am serious about it, I have their support.' Six years on, his educational achievements were enriched by a gap year in Australia, as well as a stay in the US. Taking up a job at Ernst&Young, he is ready to launch a successful career and does not consider moving back 'home'.

In slightly different circumstances, Anna, also prepared her future away from home. The first in her family to go to university, she set her sights on a degree in chemistry and applied to study at the Technical University. Whilst her choice is certainly ambitious, she is playing safe by choosing a degree with 'guaranteed entry' based on marks rather than tests at the point of admission. She makes a success of it by not only graduating with flying colours, but later enrolling in a PhD programme at her university whilst working for a large oil refining company in the city.

7.2 Type 2 – Destination: the Hungarian capital (Budapest)

This category comprises a group of students whose common denominator is having a strong Hungarian identity as well as excellent grades. As they voice a clear preference for Hungarian language education, but would not want to compromise on quality, they see their future in Hungary. They tend to come from families with HE-educated parents and often target prestigious Hungarian institutions/fields of study.

A good example is Balázs, whose parents – both engineers running a family business – take a keen interest in his education. Balázs is a highly critical and articulate

student whose interest in other countries and cultures is aroused when he stays in Denmark as an exchange student. This proves to be a lasting experience, so much so that he is keen in pursuing a career which would keep him in contact with all things Scandinavian. From an early age, he sets his sights on Hungary and would only consider studying in Slovakia as the last resort. Six years on, he is an international relations graduate at the University of Economic Sciences in Budapest. During his studies, he spent a semester at University College London as an Erasmus student and also completed an internship at the European Parliament. At the time of my revisit, he was living and working in Budapest, having joined IBM, an international corporation.

7.3 Type 3 – Destination: the Hungarian language border in Slovakia

This group includes students whose HE choice is strongly determined by their intent to return ‘home’ and live within the Hungarian language border, even if their HE studies were conducted elsewhere. Most have a preference for Hungarian language instruction, although some study in the national language because of the very limited range of Hungarian study options. Whilst many are good students, not all excelled in school. The choice of field is essential in this group, as they must look for professions which offer employment prospects ‘at home’. Generally speaking, weaker students opt for the Hungarian university in Komárno, whilst better students aim for the capital with the intention to return upon graduation.

An excellent example of returnees is Péter. Having had a very strong Slovakian-Hungarian identity instilled in him by his teacher mother and engineer father, he only considers HEIs in Slovakia: ‘It was never a question whether I return home or not’. He is very vocal about the moral obligation to stay at home ‘to keep the Hungarian identity

alive'. Whilst showing strong ethnic solidarity, he also feels a strong attachment to Slovakia, 'his' country: 'this is the state which invested in my education so I feel I ought to return by making a living in Slovakia, even though I do so as a Hungarian, in a Hungarian surrounding'. In doing so, he is following in the footsteps of his parents who both graduated in Bratislava and subsequently moved back home. With this in mind, he applies to study IT which allows him to return upon graduation and earn a decent wage whilst working from home. He is intent on encouraging others to follow his example and is drawn into (ethnic minority) politics later on. Married, with two small children, he represents the new generation of Hungarians who 'made it' whilst staying within the ethnic community.

Having a different profile, Erika is the first in her family to consider HE. Her mother wants her to follow her own dream of a career in teaching and not to miss out on life's opportunities (like she did). Considering both language and location, Erika opts for the new university in Komárno as her preferred HEI. Six years on, she is a qualified teacher well settled in her new job at a village school just across the Hungarian border, whilst continuing her life in Smalltown. Thus, like Péter, she accomplishes her goal of remaining within the language border whilst having a career she is passionate about.

Clearly, not everyone's dream can come true, even if they work hard and complete university. Andrea, raised by a single mother and her grandmother, is constantly encouraged to study 'so you can have opportunities when you grow up, the good results will be essential'. Seeing her grandma with a fatal illness makes her contemplate a career in medicine. But access to medical school is highly competitive, so she puts down biology as a safety choice. She is eventually accepted for the latter based on her grade average and completes her studies in the capital city. Six years on, she has graduated, got married, moved back home and had a baby. But having to face limited work opportunities in

Smalltown and its surroundings does not only affect her, but her whole family. Her husband, an engineering graduate of the Technical University, must accept semi-skilled work in a local factory as more highly-skilled jobs are not available in the vicinity. On my last visit, Andrea was on maternity leave with her second baby, whilst her husband continued to work in the factory.

8. WHO GOES WHERE AND WHY? DISCUSSION

There is no straightforward answer to the question of how Hungarian ethnic minority students make their HE decisions in the Slovakian setting, but both social class and ethnic identity shape their decision-making. Class differences become evident early on, since not everyone has a career or profession in mind when approaching HE. Many lack the relevant cultural capital to be ‘in the know’ regarding the significance of attending preparatory classes and/or lack access to sufficient economic capital to afford to pay for such lessons. Thus, those who resemble the British ‘contingent’ choosers (Reay, David & Ball, 2005; Ball, Reay & David, 2003) must suffer the consequences of being the first in their families to go on to study in HE. Accordingly, Andrea’s chances of entering medicine are immediately destroyed, whilst Péter and Tibor – as ‘embedded’ choosers – enjoy the benefits of their privileged position. As class advantages accumulate, the boys have the best chance of entering their chosen HEIs, whilst Andrea is left out of the competition early on. Thus, social class plays a key role in the decision-making of Hungarian minority students in Slovakia, setting apart first generation students from those with a family history of HE. For the former, location and language are paramount, hence they overwhelmingly apply to the new university and the branch campuses in close

proximity to Smalltown (instead of full-time education at high tariff institutions) as a way of risk-aversion. Here, local decisions represent both close-knit family relationships and strong community ties as well as concerns about confronting xenophobia and risking isolation at majority institutions. As a result, they disregard 'certain universities, or types of universities, or areas of the country as possible choices' (Ball et al 2002: 348). In doing so, Hungarian students show a strong resemblance to contingent ethnic minority choosers in the UK who disregard the status implications of having a degree from an 'ethnic university' in favour of fitting in the student body.

But it is not contingent choosers alone who are concerned with the language of instruction, as many embedded choosers are opting for Budapest rather than Bratislava when looking for high quality higher education. As a result, some career trajectories ran parallel, such as that of Gábor and Balázs, both of whom went on to study at prestigious HE institutions (one in the Slovakian capital, the other in the Hungarian) and being employed by international corporations such as IBM. Thus, unlike in the British case, HE choice for Hungarians becomes more 'about sustaining aspects of their ethnic identity or having this identity valued and defended, or at least not having to defend or assert the value of their identity' (Ball et al 2002, pp. 348), as even many of those who study in the Slovak capital end up returning upon graduation, and they do so in spite of achieving lower returns in the labour market when taking up graduate employment back 'home' (i.e. within the language border).

Those who leave the language border are able to significantly improve their career prospects, but at a cost. Whilst both Bratislava and Budapest provide unparalleled work and life prospects, as the case studies have shown, what they also have in common is potential assimilation and a loss for the ethnic minority community for good. In turn, the fates of those who chose to return depend on the transportability of their degrees or

availability of high skilled jobs in Smalltown. In practice, this often means settling for careers which are not necessarily related to their chosen profession or accepting work which would not require HE. Unless of course they find a niche that allows them to live in Smalltown like Péter, whose IT work can be carried out anywhere where there is a laptop and an Internet connection. Whilst teacher-graduates fare generally better in terms of finding employment, it is just a question of time when the limited teaching positions will be filled in Smalltown and they will need to move on to other pastures (e.g. Erika had to look for a job in the neighbouring Hungary in order to remain in Smalltown). Not only that, their earning potential will remain relatively low, since Slovakia has the lowest-paid teachers among OECD countries (OECD, 2016). For those studying economics or business, returning home could mean a compromise in terms of access to jobs and earning potential. This is the case of Róbert, a business graduate from Komárno, who now runs the village shop, like Tibor's wife, who opened her own hobby shop in Smalltown. These jobs are far from the career opportunities and life styles enjoyed by their peers in the capital city who work for international organisations. Thus, by returning home, young Hungarians often under-use their HE credentials when taking up jobs that originally required high school qualifications, thus representing a gain for the ethnic community, but a potential brain-waste for society as a whole.

CONCLUSION

In a context of massive societal, educational and political transformations, Hungarians were unable to bridge the gap with the majority with regard to HE participation: neither the opening of the EU borders, nor the foundation of the new university or the new types

of HE opportunities at home and abroad brought the proportion of higher-educated to match that of the majority. Quite to the contrary, ethnic minority HE participation became more at risk than ever before, as young people were being drawn to study at the new forms of HE closer to home, i.e. opting for part-time studies , and choosing satellite or branch campuses instead of full-time education at high tariff institutions.

This is in stark contrast with the case of Turkish students in Germany who intentionally targeted the most prestigious HEIs. Nevertheless, comparisons can be drawn with ethnic minorities in the UK who seemed to prefer ethnically mixed modern universities to the more prestigious HEIs. But, whereas in Britain ethnicity was not a prime consideration, ethnic identity maintenance was paramount in the choice-making process of Hungarian youth. Even though some put their careers first and disengaged from the community, for the majority, HE choice was framed by an attempt to retain their Hungarian identity without severing the links with the Hungarian community. In this context, HE choices became markers of ethnic identity as well as individual futures affecting the life chances and career prospects of individuals alongside the survival of the Hungarian ethnic community.

NOTES

¹ As a result of the Treaty of Trianon (1920) Hungary lost 71% of its area and 62% of its population, when one third of Hungarians, about 3-4 million people, suddenly became minorities of the surrounding States, mostly living just across the newly redefined borders (A magyarok, 2006).

² At the latest census day (Census 2011), over half a million people declared their mother tongue as Hungarian in the Slovak Republik, making it the country's largest ethnic minority group (10%).

³ Although the 'long degrees' were split into two as a result of the Bologna Process, in subsequent years, 90% of students remained at the same institution for their masters (UIPS, 2006).

⁴ Finance is not discussed since there are no fees. At the time of the research, HE studies were state-funded in Slovakia.

REFERENCES

- A magyarok krónikája (2006). [The chronicle of Hungarians]. Budapest: Helikon Kiadó.
- Arum, R., Gamoran, A., & Shavit, Y. (2007). More inclusion than diversion: Expansion, differentiation, and market structure in higher education. In Y. Shavit, R. Arum, & A. Gamoran (Eds.), *Stratification in higher education. A comparative study*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Baláž, V. & Williams, A. (2004). 'Been there, done that': international student migration and human capital transfers from the UK to Slovakia. *Population, Space and Place*, 10, 217-23.
- Ball, S., Reay, D., & David, M. (2002). 'Ethnic Choosing': minority ethnic students, social class and higher education choice; *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 4, 333-357.
- Ball, S. & Vincent, C. (1998). 'I heard it on the grapevine': 'hot' knowledge and school choice, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 3, 377-400.
- Barta, J., Devínsky, F., Fedák, M., Hric, M., Medved', M., Ostrovský, I., Pilát, E., Pišút, J., Štich, I., (2012) *Hodnotenie fakúlt vysokých škôl 2012* [Evaluation of faculties of HEIs] (Bratislava: ARRA Retrieved from http://www.arra.sk/sites/arra.sk/files/arra_sprava_2012_0.pdf
- Bhattachayya, G., Ison, L., & Blair, M. (2003). *Minority Ethnic Attainment and Participation in Education and Training: The evidence*. Research topic paper RTP01-03. London: DfES. Retrieved from <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RTP01-03MIG1734.pdf>

- Boliver, V. (2016). Exploring ethnic inequalities in admission to Russell Group universities. *Sociology*, 2, 247-266.
- Breen, R. & Jonsson, J.O. (2005). Inequality of opportunity in comparative perspective: recent research on educational attainment and social mobility. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31, 223-243.
- Brubaker, R. (1995). National minorities, nationalizing states, and external national homelands in the new Europe. *Daedalus*, 2, 107-132.
- Connor, H., Tyers, C., Modood, T., & Hillage, J. (2004) *Why the difference: A closer look at ethnic minority students and graduates*, Research report No. 552 .London: DfES. Retrieved from <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/ethnicity/documents/educationreport.pdf>
- Csergo, ZS. (2007). *Talk of the nation: language and conflict in Romania and Slovakia*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- OECD (2016). *Education at a glance OECD indicators*. Paris: OECD. Retrieved from http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/education-at-a-glance-2016_eag-2016-en#.V9_ccvkrLIU
- EUROSTAT (2013) Euroindicators. Retrieved from http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-31012014-AP/EN/3-31012014-AP-EN.PDF
- Heath, A., Rethon, C., & Kilpi, E. (2008). The second generation in Western Europe: education, unemployment, and occupational attainment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, 211-235.
- Kirsten, C., Reimer, D., & Kogan, I. (2008). Higher education entry of Turkish immigrant youth in Germany. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 2-3, 127-151.

- Kogan, I. (2012). Tertiary education landscape and labour market chances of the highly educated in Central and Eastern Europe. *European Sociological Review*, 6, 701-703.
- Komzsík, A. & László, B. (2009). A szlovákiai magyar kisebbség intézményes művelődése a statisztikák tükrében [The statistical reflection of institutional education of Hungarian minority living in Slovakia]. *Fórum*, 4, 85-102.
- Lampl, Zs. (1999) Asszimilációs folyamatok — iskolaválasztás és anyanyelvhasználat [Assimilation processes – school choice and mother tongue usage] In ZS Lampl (Ed.), *A saját útját járó gyermek* [The child who is going his own way]. Bratislava: MadáchPosonium.
- Modood, T.; Berthoud, R., Lakey, J. et al. (1997). *Ethnic minorities in Britain: diversity and disadvantage*. London: Policy Studies Institute.
- Ogbu, J. (1978). *Minority education and caste: the American system in cross-cultural perspective*. New York: Academic Press.
- Ogbu, J. & Gibson, M. (1991). *Minority status and schooling*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Papp, Z.A. (2012). Az iskolaválasztás motivációi és kisebbségi perspektívái [Motivations of school choice and its minority perspectives]. *Kisebbségkutatás*, 3, 399-417. Retrieved from http://bgazrt.hu/_dbfiles/blog_files/2/0000000292/Papp%20Z.%20Attila%20-%20Az%20iskolavalasztas%20motivacioi%20es%20kisebbsegi%20perspektivai.pdf
- Pásztor, A. (2006) National minorities with respect to education. The case of Hungarians, *Review of Sociology*, 2, 5–35.
- Pásztor, A. (2010) 'Go, go on and go higher an' higher'. Second generation Turks' understanding of the role of education and their struggle through the Dutch school system. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 1, 59-70.

- Pásztor, A. (2012) Imagined Futures: Why business studies dominate the higher education choices of second generation Turks in the Netherlands, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4, 704-717.
- Purcell, K., Elias, P., Ellison, R., Atfield, G., Adam, D. & Livanos, I. (2008) *Applying for Higher Education – The Diversity of Career Choices, Plans and Expectations*. Warwick: IER/HECSU. Accessed at:
http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/Applying_for_higher_education.pdf
- Reay, D., David, M. & Ball, S. (2005). *Degrees of choice: social class, race and gender in higher education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- Richardson, J.T.E. (2008). The attainment of ethnic minority students in UK higher education, *Studies in Higher Education*, 1, 33-48.
- Shavit, Y. & Blossfeld, HP. (1993). *Persistent inequality, changing educational attainment in thirteen countries*. Oxford: Westview Press.
- Sorbán, A. & Dobos, F. (1997). Szociológiai felmérés a határon túl élő magyar közösségek körében az asszimiláció folyamatairól. Iskolaválasztás és anyanyelvhasználat [Sociological survey on assimilation among Hungarian communities living outside the borders of Hungary. School choice and use of mother tongue]. *Magyar Kisebbség*, 3-4, 293-323.
- Tolley, J. & Rundle, J. (2006). *A review of black and minority ethnic participation in higher education*. Liverpool: Aimhigher.
- Torgerson, C., Gorard, S., Low, G., Ainsworth, H., Huat See, B. & Wright, K. (2008) What are the factors that promote high post-16 participation of many minority ethnic groups? (London: SSRU). Accessed at:
<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=2386>

UIPS. (2006) Prijímacie konanie na vysoké školy na akademický rok 2005/2006 v číslach a grafoch [Admission procedures for HEIs for the 2005/6 academic year in numbers and graphs] http://web.uips.sk/download/vs/PK2005_tg.pdf

TABLE 1 Preferred language of instruction and university location by students' average grades across two secondary schools in Smalltown (in %)

	As	Bs	Cs
<i>Preferred language of instruction</i>			
<i>Hungarian</i>	52.6	68.0	83.8
<i>Slovak</i>	36.8	12.0	13.5
<i>Other language</i>	10.5	20.0	2.7
Total	100	100	100
<i>Preferred university location (within Slovakia)</i>			
<i>Bratislava</i>	57.9	40	22.2
<i>Nitra</i>	21.1	20	22.2
<i>Komárno</i>	15.8	28	41.7
<i>Other location</i>	0	4	5.6
<i>Location not relevant</i>	5.3	8	8.3
Total	100	100	100